

JAMES P. WILLETT DEAD

The Former Postmaster Falls Down an Elevator Shaft.

A Shocking Accident in the New City Postoffice—Supposed to Have Tripped Over an Insecure Bar—Resulting in the Death of a Well-Known Man.

Former City Postmaster James Polk Willett fell a hundred feet through an elevator shaft on the west side of the Postoffice Building at 9:15 o'clock this morning, and was instantly killed. He struck the great iron cross beam of the elevator, which was stationary in the basement, with great violence. There was a perceptible movement of the elevator from the shock. The body landed crosswise on the beam and hung upon it.

At the time James Queen, colored, in charge of the elevator, had his hand on the handle bar ready to ascend and if the body had not struck and stopped where it did Queen would have been crushed and there might have been two deaths instead of one.

No one seems to have seen the body of Mr. Willett in its descent, nor was there a witness on the fourth floor from where he fell. The supposition is that after leaving the elevator Mr. Willett was attacked with vertigo or apoplexy, and staggered, stumbled over the temporary bar, consisting of a narrow door, laid crosswise of the shaft. His umbrella was subsequently found lying on the floor a few feet from the door through which he started to fall, showing that he might have dropped it in his attempt to recover himself.

Picked Up Dead.

A number of the Parcel Delivery Company's workmen were near the bottom of the shaft when the body alighted, and those who saw it were taken to the nearest beam state that life was extinct when they reached him. Among these were Peter Doyle and James E. Blais, the conductor of the passenger elevator, which took Mr. Willett up and landed him on the fourth floor two minutes prior to the accident. Blais had proceeded with his elevator to the fifth floor and was in the act of returning to the basement when the accident happened. Blais said that as the body fell he saw the beam being soiled two feet from the shaft, where there was no sign of life.

The body was taken into the City Postmaster's room, where it was examined by Dr. James E. Jones, who pronounced life extinct. It was subsequently taken in charge by Undertaker Speare, and conveyed to the residence of Postmaster General on 30th Street.

During the hour the body lay at the postoffice it was viewed by an immense crowd of people who gathered in front of the building. Work was practically suspended in the department during the morning.

The elevator is used only for freight, and is the centre of three located together, the side elevators being used for passenger traffic.

In describing the accident James E. Blais, who was in charge of the elevator on the north, which conveyed Mr. Willett to the fourth floor this morning, said:

"Mr. Willett entered the elevator this morning, greeting me cheerfully, but I noticed something peculiarly distressing in his countenance, and his actions were unusually nervous."

"I thought it strange that he got off on the fourth floor, for in his frequent trips with me this week he invariably alighted on the floor above, his business seeming to be with the Assistant Postmaster General on the fifth story. He alighted, hesitatingly, and I noticed his bewildered look as he walked away from the elevator. I closed my bar and proceeded upward, noting that a temporary bar, which was also before the freight elevator opening. Mr. Willett must have toppled over this bar, for I think it was intact in its place as I descended."

"Mr. Willett told me he was suffering from an attack of biliousness, and asked to be taken to the pay and allowance division after requesting to be let out on the fourth floor."

Views of the Accident.

The chief engineer, George Reed, said:

"I had ordered all elevator conductors to see to it that no elevator openings were left unprotected, and if they did not report dereliction in this respect on the part of the Parcel Delivery Company's employees in charge of freight elevators, used in moving furniture I would dismiss them."

Mr. Reed added that the Merchants' Delivery Company had been allowed to temporarily remove the doors while in the act of bringing in furniture, but that they were also admonished to put the barriers when they left the openings.

W. G. Himrod, foreman in charge of the removal, who was stationed at the basement door of the building and within a few feet of the spot where the accident occurred, stated that he had been taking this morning and barriers were before the freight elevator openings, including the one where the accident occurred, and he corroborated Mr. Reed about the orders in this respect.

The incidents leading up to the death of Mr. Willett were given to The Times by First Assistant Postmaster General Perry Heath:

"Some months ago," said Mr. Heath, "Mr. Willett, who was formerly Assistant General for the temporary position of superintendent of the new Postoffice Building. This position was supposed to last about six days. Postmaster General Smith appointed him, but the new building had not been turned over by the Treasury Department, and could not be, according to law, until the Postmaster General was ready to occupy it, the appointment had to be revoked about ten days after it was made."

Mr. Willett, who was very popular with all, then applied for a clerical position in the department. He had recently been to see me a number of times, and was here yesterday afternoon. I told him we had no room for him, and to come back this morning, and I would let him know what we could do."

Was in Bad Health.

"Mr. Willett was very much distressed when I saw him yesterday, and he reminded me of a person on the verge of apoplexy. He was exceedingly nervous, and he conversed I was impressed with the continued twitches of the muscles of his face, and the tears which sprang from his eyes. I thought of his condition, and I went home last night, and looked forward to this morning when I should meet him and give him some good news that might remove his distress."

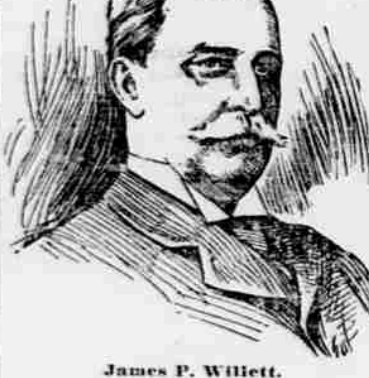
"Mr. Willett hereafter appeared to be in a good physical condition and was usually pleasant and affable to all. His terrible death is a shock to the department, for he was a man well and favorably known throughout its branches."

Mr. Willett would probably have been appointed to a \$1,800 position this morning in connection with the City Postoffice, had he reached Mr. Heath, who arrived at the department about fifteen minutes after the death of the man to whom he was hastening, with good news.

The early morning scenes about the Postoffice Building, especially in the room of the City Postmaster, were distressing. For, not only had the late Postmaster arrived and viewed the father's body, which was stretched upon the floor. These sons were James P., Jr., Robert, and Howard. The body was clothed in black cloth, and as the handkerchief was removed from the upturned face not a scratch nor drop of blood was perceptible.

Another incident of the accident occurred when the body of Mr. Willett struck the crossbeam of the elevator at the bottom.

John W. Hallyday, a chief of division, was about to enter the door when he heard the thud of the body, but he did not momentarily realize what had happened. A woman who had just entered the room, as she was in the act of swooning, Mr. Hallyday sprang forward and caught her, preventing her striking the marble floor. She saw the body of Mr. Willett strike the fatal crossbeam.



James P. Willett.

Mr. Willett was one of the most prominent citizens of the District. His public spirit, coupled with his constant geniality, made for him many friends among the leading men of the city. Not only was he known to those high in business and social circles, but to persons in the humblest walks of life. He always had the warmest of the city and District at heart, and was connected prominently with its advancement.

This morning when the news of his death had gained circulation many prominent men were heard to express sorrow and say that his death is a decided loss to the community. He was always charitable and his charity often extended to making the leading men of the city. Not only was he known to those high in business and social circles, but to persons in the humblest walks of life. He always had the warmest of the city and District at heart, and was connected prominently with its advancement.

He was a life-long resident of Washington, and had been prominent in the affairs of Washington since the civil war.

Born in Washington.

Mr. Willett was born in Washington November 27, 1841. His father, Voltaire Willett, was originally from Maryland, but came to this city when still a young man and engaged in the business of buying and selling cattle.

Mr. Willett was sent to the public schools of the District and after completing the course of study offered here went to Charlotte Hall, in southern Maryland. He started his business career as a clerk and bookkeeper for the late J. P. Bartholomew, who conducted a general hardware business on Seventh Street, between Pennsylvania Avenue and B Street northwest.

He remained with the hardware firm for five or six years. In March, 1871, he became partner with Henry T. Ruffin in the latter's and furrier's business, the firm being Willett & Ruffin. A store was opened at 905 Pennsylvania Avenue northwest.

Mr. Willett remained in the firm until 1885 when he retired, having found that his duties as postmaster interfered with his business. He was prosperous in commercial life.

It was during his business career that he participated actively in public affairs. For many years he belonged to the National Guard of the District and before his retirement from it attained the rank of major. He was connected in various capacities with the work of the citizens in preparing for the inaugurations of various Presidents who took the oath of office during his lifetime.

When President Cleveland was inaugurated by his first term Mr. Willett was a member of the executive committee. It was then that he met Mr. Cleveland.

Appointed Postmaster.

When President Cleveland was elected for a second term and it became necessary to appoint a new Postmaster for Washington Mr. Willett's name was mentioned among others, but it was thought at the time that there were others who had better prospects.

Mr. Cleveland, however, recalled Mr. Willett's official record during his inauguration and made the appointment November 20, 1894. Mr. Willett assumed the duties of his office November 11.

During his administration Mr. Willett improved the local postal service in many ways.

Mr. Willett was respected and beloved by the employees of the postoffice and his tragic death was a great shock to all.

Mr. Willett was prominent in Masonic circles and belonged to Washington, Commandery Knights Templar and to Federal Lodge F. A. A. M. He is survived by a widow and four sons and one daughter.

The widow was Miss Anna M. Willett, of Georgetown. She was married to Mr. Willett in 1873. The sons are: James P. Willett, Jr., who is a clerk in the Custom House at Georgetown; Robert V. Willett, twenty-two years of age; Howard V. Willett, and Albert Willett.

Robert V. Willett had just been appointed to a position in the office of Sergeant-at-Arms Bright at the Capitol, and was on his way to take the oath of office when he heard the news of his father's death. The daughter, Mrs. Graham Hume, was married to a Mr. Hume.

Mr. Willett is survived by a brother, Robert Willett, who is the clerk of the District Court of Appeals, and by two sisters, Mrs. M. A. Gilbert, and Miss Louise Willett.

During the summer months the deceased had lived upon his farm near Ballston, and had made arrangements this morning to move back to the city.

The funeral arrangements have not yet been completed.

B. & O.—to Frederick, Hagerstown, and Winchester.

By special train leaving Washington 8:15 a. m., and returning 10:15 p. m., and Winchester at 7, and Frederick 8 p. m. same day. Tickets also sold from intermediate stations. Rate of \$2.50 includes admission to cars.

Many car loads flooring.

Best before advance—low prices. 6th and N. Y. ave.

CARTER GOES TO PRISON

The Court-Martial's Sentence Approved by the President.

The Convicted Captain to Be Dismissed the Service, Confined for Five Years in the United States Penitentiary at Fort Leavenworth, and Pay a Fine of \$5,000.

Capt. Oberlin M. Carter, who was convicted over two years ago by a court-martial of misappropriating Government funds as engineer officer in charge of the improvements of Savannah harbor, will be required to serve the sentence imposed upon him. This decision has just been reached by the President.

The Carter case is the most unique in the annals of military courts. The accused was found guilty of embezzling about \$1,600,000. The defence appealed to the President and the convicted captain has for about two years been allowed to draw his pay as an officer in the army and enjoy all the liberties of a free man. The following findings of the court and the decision of the President were made public today:

And the court does therefore sentence the accused, Capt. Oberlin M. Carter, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, to be dismissed from the service of the United States, to suffer a fine of five thousand dollars, to be confined at hard labor, at such place as the proper authority may direct, for five years, and the crime, punishment, name, and place of abode of the accused to be published in the newspapers in and about the station and the State from which the accused came, or where he usually resides.

The findings of the court-martial in the matter of the foregoing proceedings against Capt. Oberlin M. Carter, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, are hereby approved as to all except the following:

Charge II, specifications 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Charge III, specifications 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12, which are dropped.

And the sentence imposed by the court-martial upon the defendant, Oberlin M. Carter, is hereby approved.

ELIHU ROOT, Secretary of War.

Executive Mansion, Washington, D. C., Sept. 29, 1899. Approved and confirmed.

WILLIAM McKINLEY.

The following order has been issued by the Secretary of War:

By direction of the Secretary of War, Capt. Oberlin M. Carter, Corps of Engineers, is hereby ordered to be dismissed from the service of the United States, to suffer a fine of five thousand dollars, to be confined at hard labor, at such place as the proper authority may direct, for five years, and the crime, punishment, name, and place of abode of the accused to be published in the newspapers in and about the station and the State from which the accused came, or where he usually resides.

By command of Major General Miles: A. C. CORBIN, Adjutant General.

Captain Carter Arrested.

Captain Carter was placed under arrest at 7:15 o'clock this morning in New York by Major William L. Simpson, Assistant Adjutant General, U. S. A. Major Simpson left Washington yesterday evening with an order for Captain Carter's arrest, and telegraphed the Adjutant General this morning that he had taken Captain Carter into custody at the New York Athletic Club at the time named and escorted him to the Governor's Island, where he was placed in confinement.

Capt. Oberlin M. Carter's case will go down in history as a celebrated one. No criminal prosecution for embezzlement has ever in this country created such widespread interest, or brought to bear such powerful influence as this court-martial proceeding has done. In the endeavor to prevent the finding of the court-martial from being carried into effect.

Captain Carter, Engineer Corps U. S. A., was born in Ohio. He received an education at the Military Academy at West Point, and graduated at the head of his class. After having done some service he was placed by the Government in charge of harbor improvements and fortifications for the district of Savannah, Ga., and he remained there until 1876, when he was appointed military attaché to the United States Embassy in London.

Almost immediately after Captain Carter was ordered to this duty his successor at Savannah, Captain Gillette, discovered enormous discrepancies in Captain Carter's accounts and gross frauds in the quality of the harbor improvements. Captain Gillette reported his discovery to the War Department, and the War Department ordered an investigation to be made during the months of July and August, 1887.

The board of engineers who conducted the investigation recommended on November 20, 1887, that he be tried by court-martial. The Secretary of War acted on this recommendation and a court-martial was convened January 12, 1888.

Carter was tried and denied his guilt emphatically and expressed his willingness to have the trial proceed. The charges before the court were:

Conspiring to defraud the United States, causing false and fraudulent claims to be made against the United States; conducting unbecomingly as an officer and gentleman, and finally, embezzling \$1,600,000.

The trial lasted five months and the prosecution was fought with untiring energy. Evidence was taken at Savannah, in New York, and other places, and when it was all in it made 5,600 pages. The evidence was overwhelmingly against the accused officer, and the court-martial found him guilty on all counts.

This was done May 12, 1888, and the sentence imposed was that he be cashiered from the army, imprisoned for five years, and to pay a fine of \$5,000. The record of the trial was sent to President McKinley July 15, 1888, for approval, but was not acted upon until today.

Ele Stop a Flour Mill.

ELKTON, Md., Sept. 30.—Ele stopped the water wheel of a flour mill at Bay View, Cecil county, yesterday. The mill had to be closed three times so that the ele could be cleaned out.

A Nice Way to Spend Sunday.

Two special trains to Chesapeake Beach to and from Washington, Sept. 30, and Oct. 1, and 11 a. m. Five hours for bathing, crabbing, and fishing. Round trip, 50c. The Columbia car.

\$2.50 to Luray Caverns via B. & O.

Special train leaving Washington at 8:15 a. m. Sunday, October 1. Returning, leave Luray 5:30 p. m. Tickets also sold from intermediate stations. Rate of \$2.50 includes admission to caverns.

Flooring, all one width.

In kiln dried North Carolina pine; low prices.

THROWING UP BREASTWORKS.

Excitement at Pretoria Over Hasty War Preparations.

JOHANNESBURG, Sept. 30.—Both sides are concentrating their forces at Ladang's Neck. Breastworks are being thrown up and strategic positions occupied in this neighborhood.

PRETORIA, Sept. 30.—The wildest excitement prevails here. Vice President and Commander General Joubert will go to Volksrust on the border today. Twenty-six ammunition trains have already started for this point. It is believed that all government departments and the high courts of justice will close today, and that martial law will be proclaimed. All women and children are leaving Bloemfontein.

LONDON, Sept. 30.—The reply of the Transvaal Government to Colonel Secretary Chamberlain's last despatch has not yet been received here. It is believed that there has been a breakdown of some of the South African land wires. Gen. Sir Redvers Buller, who will command the British troops in South Africa in case of war, will sail for the Cape on October 14.

GIVING UP PRISONERS.

General Desires to Surrender the Mindanao Province to Otis.

MANILA, Sept. 30.—Fourteen American prisoners, in charge of General Alejandro, and two Filipino majors, reached Angeles at 9:15 this morning. They are on their way to Manila, where the Filipino officers desire to interview General Otis.

It was stated in despatches from Manila yesterday that General Alejandro would be allowed to pass through the American lines with the American prisoners.

The insurgent majors entered the American lines on September 28, and said the Filipinos were willing to release the American prisoners held by them. In return they requested permission for a commission of insurgent officers to pass through the lines. This request was granted, but the next day the advance on Porac had begun when the insurgent officers appeared. Then the American commander declined to allow them to pass through our lines.

The Secretary of War received a cablegram from General Otis this morning announcing that General Garcia, commanding all the troops in the eastern part of Mindanao, had addressed to him a letter expressing a desire to surrender and to turn over the province to the American authorities.

General Otis' despatch follows:

Adjutant General, Washington, Sept. 30, 1899.

Communicated by cable from General Garcia, commanding all insurgent troops in Eastern Mindanao, expresses desire to turn over to United States authorities, and surrender all insurgent arms.

OTIS.

The following despatch was also received at the War Department this morning:

Adjutant General, Washington, September 30, 1899.

Ohio, 3 officers, 40 men; Nevada Cavalry, 215 men, sailed yesterday via Hongkong and Guam; two men, Nevada Cavalry, 35 men, sailed today.

OTIS.

GENERAL RENGLIO'S DEATH.

The Diplomat and Soldier Drowned in a South American River.

NEW YORK, Sept. 30.—A cable to the "Herald" from Panama says:

By the burning of the steamer Montevideo, the Colombian Transport Line on the Magdalena River, a week ago, thirty lives were lost, including that of Gen. Julio Rengifo, former secretary of the Treasury of Colombia and Minister to Ecuador. One of the victims was a woman.

The French steamer Lafayette, which arrived at Colon from Sabanailla this morning, brought details of the disaster. The Montevideo left Honda, far up the river, on September 17. The fire seems to have started at night in a store room between the decks, where the cabins and saloons are located. Of the fifty passengers aboard, only twenty were rescued. The rest were either drowned or burned to ashes.

Among the victims, besides General Rengifo, were Senor Gomez, a prominent man from Boyaca; Captain Plata, who was coming down to join the Panama garrison; Captain Gonzalez, commanding the Montevideo. Among those saved from the wreck were an American from Philadelphia, Mr. Whitekin, chief engineer of the Antioquia Railroad, and a Mr. Jones, from Liverpool.

The Colombian Legation yesterday received a cable despatch from its Government announcing that Senor Don Julio Rengifo, who was, in 1896, Secretary of the Colombian Legation and Charge d'Affaires in the Diplomatic Corps in London and in interim in Washington, who had been Secretary of the Treasury of Colombia from 1898 to 1899, and who had later been accredited as Minister to Ecuador, had been drowned in the Magdalena River while on his way to the United States.

General Rengifo was by profession a soldier, and early made a name in his native country for military ability. He more than once took a prominent part in the rebellion in Colombia, and by his energy, fearlessness, and real ability accomplished results which won for him high rank in the military service of his country. He was a general in the Colombian army, and bore a conspicuous and distinguished part in the military service of his country. He was a general in the Colombian army, and bore a conspicuous and distinguished part in the military service of his country.

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